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ABSTRACT

This booklet is about planning for citizen involvement; it suggests both a framework and a process for planning, after interest in an idea is evident but before resources for implementation are available. Experience with citizen involvement efforts suggests that successful planning has three elements. The first is a shared vision of potential: what the future will be like after the proposed change is introduced, what results are expected, what purposes will be met, and who must be satisfied. The second element is commitment and support for the proposed change, not only from those who are directly involved in the planning effort, but also from those who will supervise or help carry out the new practice. The third element is a planning design based on these shared perceptions and support, with adequate preparation for startup and a procedure for later monitoring and problem-solving. Each of these elements is discussed in more detail in the booklet. (Author/MLF)

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Keys to Community Involvement Series

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KEYS TO COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

PLANNING FOR CHANGE: THREE CRITICAL ELEMENTS

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ABOUT THE SERIES

Keys to Community Involvement is a series of booklets developed for governing boards, community leaders, group members, administrators and citizens. The booklets are designed to help these audiences strengthen their skills in group processes, work cooperatively with others, and plan and carry out new projects. Topics include techniques to maintain enthusiasm in a group, ways that agencies can effectively use consultants, and factors that affect introducing and implementing new projects.

The booklets are written by members of the Rural Education Program of the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. The Laboratory is a nonprofit, educational research and development corporation, headquartered in Portland, Oregon.

The booklets in the series are adapted from a much more comprehensive set of materials and training activities developed and field tested by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory over the past several years in dozens of locations throughout the western United States.

Information about other booklets in this series--titles and how to order--as well as information about related services--training, workshops and consultation--can be found on the inside and outside back covers of this booklet.

THE CONTEXT OF PLANNING

Good ideas--creative, worthy notions about the way things might be--are plentiful. The idea of partnership between organizations and communities to improve services, for example, is powerful. Discussions, journal articles, even presidential encouragement, have generated interest and investigation of citizen involvement in decision making.

Yet many such good ideas are never put into practice, many more die out within six months of their inception, and others slowly resume the characteristics of "business as usual." Why? What's wrong with the kinds of plans we make and the way we carry them out? How can schools or other organizations have some assurance that their investment of human and financial resources will make a difference, will pay off?

The keys to successful change appear to lie in the way ideas are transformed into reality through the activities we call planning and implementation. This booklet is about planning for citizen involvement; it suggests both a framework and a process for planning, after interest in an idea is evident but before resources for implementation are available.

An examination of the tools and techniques that planners have developed over the years to provide precision and clarity to planning events (examples are PERT, GANTT charting, PPBS) is outside the scope of this booklet. Information about these topics is readily available from other sources.

A companion booklet in this series, "Successful Projects: Examining the Research," provides information about implementation activities. Both booklets are directed to people who are from groups or agencies that are sponsoring a community participation program and who have a role in planning that program.

A FRAMEWORK FOR PLANNING

Planning efforts often focus exclusively on the intended change itself--what its parts are, who will attend to each part, when activities must occur and in what sequence, how necessary approvals will be obtained and so forth. Although this aspect of planning, called planning design in this booklet, is indeed important, two other aspects require equal attention, yet are seldom considered.

The experience of the Rural Education Program with citizen involvement efforts suggests that successful planning has three elements:

- a shared vision of potential: what the future will be like after the proposed change is introduced, what results are expected, what purposes will be met and who must be satisfied

- commitment and support for the proposed change, not only from those who are directly involved in the planning effort, but also from those who will supervise or help carry out the new practice, those responsible for practices that complement or overlap the new practice and informal opinion leaders in

the organization and among its constituents (community, student body, etc.)

- a planning design based on these shared perceptions and support, with adequate preparation for startup and a procedure for later monitoring and problem solving

Each of these elements is discussed in more detail in the following paragraphs.

A SHARED VISION OF POTENTIAL

How often have you gritted your teeth through an argumentative meeting, only to discover late in the day that what was a personnel issue to some was a finance issue to others? Or have you helped start a new practice that met all administrative needs superbly but merely confused recipients, or vice versa?

These examples point out two common weaknesses in planning efforts:

- the tendency to overestimate how often we automatically interpret ideas in the same way, hold the same meaning for words and phrases and infer the same purpose from short statements

- the corresponding tendency to expect that if a change will meet all the purposes one group has in mind, then surely all groups will be satisfied

Not so, particularly with a change like citizen involvement. A citizen involvement program invites individuals to work together who probably have not done so before, and it affects policy boards, administrators, professional staff and constituent groups alike.

It is therefore crucial for all parties to be able to identify with and aspire to a common set of program goals or purposes. This does not mean that goals or expectations require unanimity--only that they be shared and resolved to the point where no inherent conflicts exist.

COMMITMENT AND SUPPORT

Difficult to accept as it may be, evidence is mounting that a favorable program setting has more to do with program success than unique program characteristics. Berman and McLaughlin,[1] for example, found high staff morale, support from several levels of administration and staff willingness to make extra efforts to be central factors in introducing new programs in schools.

The program characteristics also having important effects on success were clearly related to program setting:

- how innovation was implemented (practical training, flexibility to adapt, a "critical mass" of staff)
- the substance and scope of change (program priority, need for staff behavior change, number of changes and actors required and consonance of program/staff values)

Consequently, for planning community involvement efforts several factors emerge as critical:

- composing the planning group so that all parties are represented fully and fairly
- developing an information network that uses both formal and informal methods to stimulate interest, examine the issues involved and gain commitment from those the program will affect

- building a genuine understanding of the significance of the program to the organization and to the community--not merely its ability to meet legal requirements or to solve an immediate crisis but to bring organizational services more in line with current societal needs

- planning the program to replace or convert some existing activities, rather than adding to already overburdened schedules

- making provisions for training and outside assistance that are specifically geared to your community and situation

- providing incentives to organization and community members or groups for their investment of time and effort

PLANNING DESIGN

Once goals are established, the features of a plan leading to the goals and the steps necessary for startup can be identified, sequenced and assigned for further groundwork. Discussing these features often leads to further clarification of goals and widens understanding by all parties of the proposed change.

A planning design can, of course, be organized in many ways; the substance of the plan, however, is more important than its organization. For a citizen involvement program, the following items are worth considering:

1. Mission statement--program goals, expectations, indicators of success

2. Scope of work

   a. Project services--kinds to be provided and extent of services, initially and later on

   b. Project support--financial, organizational, interagency and constituent support needed; a method for obtaining it

3. Management plan

   a. Organization pattern to accommodate the program; how any changes will be accomplished

   b. Staffing pattern needed to accomplish the scope of work--types and number of staff needed, staff development activities needed

   c. Startup, monitoring and continuing problem solving process--what data will be collected and how often, who will use the data, how program adjustments will be made

   d. Arrangements for outside help--training, materials, consulting assistance

4. Resource plan

   a. Funding sources

   b. Distribution of funds within budget--tied to program goals if possible

5. Evaluation plan

   a. Nature of evaluation purposes

b. Evaluation design--variables selected, target groups identified, instrument development, data collection

c. Data reduction and analysis

d. Reporting--format, timing, identification of critical decision points

A PLANNING PROCESS

Once a perspective on planning is gained, the question becomes one of approach: what's the best way to go about planning so that all key elements are incorporated? Fortunately, several recent studies targeted on the development, dissemination, planning and implementation of successful projects have yielded rather consistent, albeit partial, clues for planners and implementers.[2] The findings have all stressed:

- the close, nearly inextricable bond between planning and implementation that calls for a planning-action-feedback-planning cycle of continuous problem solving

- the importance of acknowledging, and tying planning/implementation activities to, the socio-political-economic setting where change will take place

Of the six "classic" planning/implementation models described by Miles--"muddling through," natural development, engineering/architecture, rationalized program development, simulation and adaptive planning--adaptive planning provides an approach that welds together the planning framework proposed earlier with the result of the research cited. A short definition of adaptive planning is:

- planning that systematically enables people to share their ideas, identify major concerns, search for alternative solutions, decide what they will do, implement their decisions and assess the outcomes

- planning that establishes communication among local, regional and state participants

- planning that occurs regularly to address concerns and make adjustments as needed

- planning that is based on data about what did and did not work well and that adjusts activities accordingly[3]

Reflecting on prior experience of the Rural Education Program and the results of the studies mentioned, a few guidelines for an adaptive planning approach can be postulated:

1. Examine your group and revise its membership until you have a good balance among experts, administrators and staff, constituents and those who control the resources.

2. Work together to develop a shared sense of purpose and commitment; work individually with those you represent to spread information, collect feedback and build commitment.

3. Gather data from previous experiences and informants along the communication network.

4. Decide on the features of your plan one at a time; leave space in between for action or communication and feedback.

5. Be honest; solicit and use critical feedback as well as compliments.

6. Keep design related to purpose; the spirit behind design features is more significant than the detail of them.

7. Don't ignore issues of power, relationships and governance because they are stickier than technical issues; they are also more important in the real world.

8. Take care to avoid expediency and laziness; make sure your actions are related to achieving your goals and that you are not drifting into "unplanning."

9. Make sure that implementation will proceed directly from planning--same purpose, commitment level, participants (at least a few), features, etc.

10. Include provisions for future problem solving--who, what, how, when and where.

11. Stop planning and go to implementation when you have agreement on purposes and expectations for the change, a preliminary design, indications of commitment, and approval of resources. Overplan can be overkill.

12. Don't be lulled into thinking adaptive planning is easy. It requires a high trust level, high tolerance for ambiguity, high energy output, willingness to experiment and acceptance of high risk from those who would attempt it.

    Even so, right now adaptive planning seems to be the best game in town.

WHAT NEXT?

To be implemented successfully, the project will need a continuing planning process. This can be created during frequent and regular meetings that involve many project participants. These meetings provide an opportunity for reassessing plans and their outcomes, for monitoring project achievements and problems and for modifying practices in light of implementation realities. Continuous planning keeps the project grounded in the day-to-day practices so that issues can be identified and solutions determined before problems become crises.

Continuous planning that involves many project people with their multiple opinions can seem like a lot of complex work. However, as one school district superintendent invited, after disclosing that his district has managed to involve 2,500 citizens in planning its annual budget, "Jump right in; the water's fine!"

FOOTNOTES

1. P. Berman and M. W. McLaughlin, Federal Programs Supporting Educational Change. Volume IV: The Findings in Review. Prepared for the U. S. Office of Education, HEW. R-1589/4-HEW. (Santa Monica, California: Rand Corporation, 1975)

2. Berman and McLaughlin, op. cit.

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Michael Fullan and Alan Pomfret, Review of Research on Curriculum Implementation. Prepared for the National Institute of Education, NIE-P-74-0122. (Ontario: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 1975)

Matthew B. Miles, Thinking About How To Do It: Alternative Models of Planning and Implementation of New Schools (A paper presented at the American Educational Research Association meetings, San Francisco, California, April 19-23, 1976)

3. Adapted from Carleen Matthews, Factors of Successful Implementation, Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 1976.

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